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AUTHOR Manese, Jeanne E.; Sedlacek, William E.

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ABSTRACT

Trends in students' religious activities and attitudes between 1973 and 1983 were studied at the University of Maryland, College Park. A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 270 incoming freshmen in 1973 and to 389 freshmen in 1983. Findings suggest a continuation of the trend of decreasing religious orthodoxy among students, with both groups showing little interest in participating in organized religious activities. The most notable change among students over the 10-year period appeared to be in designated religious preference and attitudes toward moral issues. Though the three traditionally dominant religions (Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant) were still indicated by the majority of students, a marked decrease in students indicating Jewish was shown in 1983 compared to 1973. Students in 1983 also indicated less supportive attitudes toward abortion, premarital sex, and the buying of term papers, and more supportive attitudes toward personal involvement in war. Analysis of sex differences indicated that females, compared to males, tended to have differing views of God, more positive attitudes toward religious activity, and appeared more supportive of integrating religion more broadly into their lives. Blacks differed from whites on religious preferences, views of God, and attitudes toward several issues. (Author/SW)

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CHANGES IN RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS BY RACE AND SEX OVER A TEN YEAR PERIOD

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Computer time for this project has been provided in full through the Computer Science Center of the University of Maryland.

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SUMMARY

A questionnaire on religion was administered to representative samples of incoming freshmen in 1973 (N=270) and 1983 (N=339). Overall findings suggest a continuation of the trend of decreasing religious orthodoxy among students, with both the 1983 and 1973 students showing little interest in participating in organized religious activities. The most notable change among students over the ten year period appeared to be in designated religious preference and attitudes toward moral issues. Though the three traditionally dominant religious preferences: Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant, were still indicated by the majority of students, a marked decrease in students indicating Jewish was shown in 1983 compared to 1973. Students in 1983 also indicated less supportive attitudes toward abortion, premarital sex, and the buying of term papers, and more supportive attitudes toward personal involvement in war.

Analysis of sex differences indicated that females, compared to males, tended to have differing views of God, more positive attitudes toward religious activity, and appeared more supportive of integrating religion more broadly into their lives. Blacks differed from whites on religious preferences, views of God, and attitudes toward several issues.

Areas for future research and implications for student personnel professionals are discussed.

College students in the late 60's and early 70's were characterized as anti-Establishment, rebellious, liberal, and actively involved in social issues; while students since 1977 have been labeled as the "me-generation" (Guardo, 1982). From these popular descriptors, there is an indication that college students may have changed in the last decade. However, as noted by Martinez and Sedlacek (1983), empirical assessment of student change is generally lacking.

One specific area that has been particularly overlooked is the assessment of changes in religion and religious values among college students. Hoge (1974), using studies conducted at various college campuses, analyzed the changes in religion and values among college students over five decades (1920's - 1960's). Hoge found: 1) an overall rise and fall pattern in religious orthodoxy, (i.e., beliefs and commitment to Judeo-Christian historical traditions) with a rapid decline in orthodoxy from 1956 to 1969; 2) a long term gradual decline in church attendance from the 1920's to the late 1960's; 3) increased freedom, autonomy, and personal responsibility from the 1920's among college students; and 4) an interrelation of orthodox religious values and other values (such as positive correlations with conservative political attitudes and levels of authoritarianism). However, in his research, Hoge (1974, p. 28) noted, "the data on religious trends over the decades is meager." More recent data indicated an emergence of evangelism in the early 70's, but still the continued trend toward less religious orthodoxy and church participation. As such the "mood" among college students in the late 60's and early 70's has been summarized as one of individualism and experimentation in religion (Hastings and Hoge, 1976).

In addition to the overall paucity of studies on student change in religion, there is even less empirical research on race and sex differences in religion and related values. For example, even though religion has been noted to be an important and unifying force among blacks (White, 1984), research on religious change and practices among black college students does not appear to be available.

In the literature on female college students and religion, one study on religious attitude change (McAllister, 1981) found female attitudes in 1974 to be more positive and traditional than female attitudes in the early 1970's and 1960's. Additionally, there have been some studies which have examined the relationships among religious attitudes and beliefs and sexual attitudes and beliefs among female students (King, Abernathy, Robinson, & Balswick, 1976; Mahoney, 1980; Young, 1981).

The purpose of the current study is to investigate student change in religio and related values by comparing students at the same university by race and sex over a ten year period.

Method

Representative samples of incoming freshmen at the University of Maryland, College Park were administered a questionnaire on religion and related values in 1973 (N=270) and 1983 (N=389). Data were analyzed using Chi square and analysis of variance at the .05 level.

Results

1973 vs. 1983

Descriptive data indicated the most frequently cited religious preference (See Table 1) was Catholic for both years, with an 11% increase from 1973 to 1983. The most dramatic change noted in religious preference was in the percentage of students who indicated Jewish. In 1983, only 8% reported Jewish as their religiou preference compared with 25% in 1973. Most of the students in both years were graduates of public high schools, with only about 10% each year having graduated from a parochial high school. Approximately 90% of all incoming freshmen indicate a belief in some kind of spiritual power in both 1983 and 1973 (See Table 2). Resu also showed fewer students regularly attended religious services in 1983 than 1973 (See Table 3). However, most students felt a belief in God was important to their lives in both years, and there were no significant differences by year.

Eleven of the 20 attitudinal items were signficantly different by year (See Table 4). Students in 1983, compared to students in 1973, were: more positive toward government support for church operated schools, more likely to feel that organized religion should concern itself with eternal truths rather than current issues, more likely to give money to church than charity, more likely to believe in an afterlife, and more likely to feel they could conscientiously engage in war. However, 1983 students were: less likely to feel that their parents exposed them to too much religion, less likely to enjoy choirs and gospel msuic, and less supportive of abortion, premarital sex, the buying of term papers, or yoga than were 1973 students.

Males vs. Females

The percentage of males and females each year were (1973: M-41%; F-59%; 1983: M-55%; F-45%). There were no significant differences by sex on religious preference. However, women were more likely to have differing beliefs in God than men, particularly in 1983 (Table 2). Women were more likely to believe in a personal God who answers prayers (49% vs. 43%) and in a spirit of life (13% vs. 6%) than were men. However, women were less likely to believe that there are spiritual forces outside man (11% vs. 15%) and that a person has only his/her resources to call on (5% vs. 15%).

There were 11 significant differences by sex of respondent and one signficant difference on the interaction of sex and year (See Table 4) on attitude items. Items showing significant sex differences indicated that women, in comparison to men, felt more strongly that belief in God is important to their lives and that they were not exposed to too much religion by their parents. Findings also indicated women had more positive attitudes toward participating in religious meetings and utilizing campus activities, and felt more strongly that religious activity did not interfere with school progress than men. Additionally, women were less likely to feel that organized religion should concern itself with eternal

truths rather than current issues, and that organized religion has no business in politics. The one significant sex by year interaction indicated women felt more positively than men in 1983 about listening to soul choirs and gospel music.

Women and men differed on all items emphasizing moral issues. Women indicated more supportive attitudes toward abortion and less supportive attitudes toward personal involvement in war, premarital sex, and the buying of term papers.

Blacks vs. Whites

Data indicated that most students sampled in the survey were white (1973: 70%; 1983: 77%). Blacks represented the second largest ethnic group both years (1973: 11%; 1983: 13%) followed by other minorities (1973: 7%; 1983: 9%) and those who did not specify race (1973: 12%; 1983: 1%). Blacks were more likely to be Protestant (64%) and less likely to be Jewish (0%) or Catholic (5%) than other students. There were no differences on black religious preferences by year.

Table 2 shows that blacks had different beliefs in God than whites in 1973, but not in 1983. Blacks were more likely to believe that there are spiritual forces outside man (23% vs. 13%), but less likely to believe in a Supreme Being (20% vs. 26%) or a spirit of life (7% vs. 12%).

Three significant differences by race and four differences on the interaction of race and year were found on attitude items (See Table 4). Blacks indicated significantly more negative attitudes toward personally engaging in war, greater liking for soul choirs and gospel music, and less negative attitudes toward participating in a "Jesus" movement than whites. Interaction effects indicated greater similarity between blacks and whites in 1983 than 1973 on two items. In 1983, reported enjoyment of soul choirs and gospel music was less for blacks, and both blacks and whites were more likely to feel that Church operated school is in keeping with American democracy. Two items indicated reversed trends for blacks compared to whites. First, in 1983 compared to 1973, blacks reported more negative attitudes about buying term papers; while whites showed more positive attitudes toward buying term papers. Secondly, in 1983 compared to 1973, support for the

position that organized religion should concern itself with eternal truths decreased for blacks but increased for whites.

Discussion

While the existing literature on college student trends in religion and related values is scarce, overall results of this study indicate a continuation of the decreasing religious orthodoxy among students noted since the 1950's. Students in 1983 attended church less than their 1973 counterparts, and like the 1973 student indicated little interest in participating in campus religious activities, reported they would marry someone of another religion, and asserted that an individual could be religious without attending church. Thus, at a glance, it appears that orthodox religious practice is not a central or guiding force in the lives of today's student Interestingly, though, both in 1973 and 1983 most students indicated that a belief in God is important to their lives. Taken together, the findings suggest that religion today may be operationalized by students through cognitive beliefs rather than behavioral practices, and may be integrated into one's life, personally defined, and experienced, as opposed to participating in designated rituals of specific religious groups.

One of the more striking findings was the percentage changes in student religious preference, specifically the increase in Catholics and Protestants and concomitant decrease in Jews in 1983. Knight and Sedlacek (1981) reported that only a very small percentage of Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish reared students who changed religions changed to another of these three major religious traditions. Thus, it seems that conversion of Jewish students to Catholic or Protestant is unlikely as an explanation for the percentage changes. Furthermore, prior data gathered at the University of Maryland show a relative instability in religious preference, suggesting that stated religious preference may be temporary or not strongly held. However, it may well be that a population shift on campus is occurring and further study is needed in this area for more conclusive explanations.

Other noticeable changes between the 1983 and 1973 students were the differences found in moral attitudes. The 1983 students indicated less supportive attitudes toward abortion, premarital sex, and the buying of term papers than 1973 students, which seems more consistent with orthodox religious beliefs despite the cited trend away from religious orthodox practices. However, rather than a contradiction, it may well be that positions regarding these moral issues might be mediated by the more conservative social climate in the early 1980's (Martinez and Sedlacek, 1983). In addition, the current socio-political sentiment toward emphasis on nationalism and patriotism could also explain the change to more supportive attitudes toward conscientiously engaging in war among the 1983 students

The results showed that women, compared to men, had differing views of God, tended to have more positive attitudes toward religious activity and incorporated religion more broadly into their lives. Additionally, the fact that women and men differed on all items emphasizing moral issues suggests that differential sex-role socialization processes may still be pervasive in the areas covered by the study.

Blacks had different religious preferences, beliefs, and views than whites. Martinez and Sedlacek (1982) noted that blacks and whites view the campus social norms differently in that blacks tended to feel there is more tolerance for liberal political and social views but less tolerance for liberal positions on sex, drugs, religion, and moral issues, while whites feel just the reverse is true. Thus, differing religious views and practices interacting with differing perceptions of what is sanctioned by a campus could make adjustment to college life difficult for many black students at a predominantly white university. This area needs to be stu in more depth with larger samples.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate a continuing trend among students away from participation in organized religion. It may be that the label of the "me generation" is reflected accurately here by the tendency to incorporate and define religion in their lives, not in terms of established religious practices.

but in terms of personal religious beliefs. Even though students appear to be moving away from participating in organized religion, they feel a belief in God is important to their lives. However, the counseling and advising most students receive at institutions like the University of Maryland appears to be in an a-religious or nonreligious context. More training for counselors and educators in the role religion may play in the academic and nonacademic lives of students seems warranted. Greater cooperation and coordination among chaplains and religi advisors and counseling and student affairs staff as well as faculty advisors is called for. The results of this study suggest that to do less is provide less than our best in educating and developing students.

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Table 1

Religious Preference By Year

	%1973	%1983 *
Catholic	27	38
Jewish	25	8
Protestant	25	34
Atheist/Agnostic/No preference	18	12
Christian	4	4
Other	2	5

* Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding or nonresponse.
Differences significant by year using Chi square at .05.

Table 2

Percentages* of Beliefs in God by Year, Sex, and Race

	1973%					1983%				
	Total	Male	Female	Black	White	Total	Male	Female	Black	White
I believe in a personal God who answers prayers.	39	37	40	40	37	45	43	49	46	45
I believe in a Supreme Being.	23	21	25	20	26	22	22	22	23	23
I believe in a spirit of life.	12	10	15	7	12	9	6	13	10	9
I believe that there are spiritual forces outside man.	12	17	10	23	13	13	15	11	15	13
I believe that a person has only his/her own resources to call on	12	15	10	10	12	10	15	5	6	10

* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding or nonresponse. Differences significant using Chi square at .05 for year, race in 1973 and sex in 1983.

Table 3

Religious Services Attended (Past 12 Months)

	% 1973	% 1983 *
Once a week	37	29
At lease once a month	12	14
4-11 times	21	15
1, 2, or 3 times	18	24
No attendance	13	18

* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding or nonresponse. Differences signficant at .05 using Chi square by year but not by sex or race.

Table 4

Means* and Standard Deviations for Attitude Items by Year, Race and Sex

Item No. *	1973 Black Male Mean	1973 Black Male SD	1973 Black Female Mean	1973 Black Female SD	1973 White Male Mean	1973 White Male SD	1973 White Female Mean	1973 White Female SD	1983 Black Male Mean	1983 Black Male SD	1983 Black Female Mean	1983 Black Female SD	1983 White Male Mean	1983 White Male SD	1983 White Female Mean	1983 White Female SD	Significant Differences**
1. It is all right to purchase a term paper rather than do it myself.	3.30	.95	3.54	.78	4.00	1.06	4.04	.98	4.13	1.03	4.51	.59	4.54	.66	4.54	.79	Y, S, YxR
2. Organized religion should concern itself with eternal truths rather than current issues.	3.30	.82	3.23	1.09	3.25	1.09	3.68	.85	3.13	1.22	3.79	1.02	3.05	1.04	3.25	.90	Y, S, YxR
3. Abortion is justified only when the life of the mother is at stake.	2.60	1.17	3.53	1.42	3.64	1.43	3.67	1.34	3.04	1.21	3.71	1.32	3.23	1.21	3.41	1.30	Y, S
4. I cannot conscientiously engage in war.	2.60	1.23	2.38	1.10	2.87	1.43	2.46	1.12	2.50	1.33	2.42	1.16	3.37	1.20	2.57	1.10	Y, S, R
5. I prefer to give money to charity rather than to a church.	2.70	1.11	2.77	1.00	2.40	1.21	2.60	1.00	3.21	.99	3.04	1.04	2.90	1.10	2.78	1.00	Y
6. Religious activity interferes with my progress at school.	3.00	1.51	4.08	.91	3.88	.95	4.14	.84	3.83	.98	4.29	.73	3.78	1.04	4.06	.90	S
7. Organized religion has no business in politics.	2.60	1.02	3.23	1.23	2.75	1.41	2.87	1.21	2.71	1.13	2.79	1.15	2.67	1.33	2.90	1.20	S
8. The church-operated school is in keeping with American democracy.	2.70	.83	2.42	.83	2.71	1.21	2.94	1.00	3.17	1.02	2.88	.77	2.89	.94	2.71	.91	YxR
9. Belief in God is important in my life.	1.70	.74	2.15	1.34	2.53	1.34	2.16	1.14	2.33	1.13	1.92	.98	2.40	1.24	2.04	1.14	S
10. Government aid to church-operated schools is desirable.	2.90	1.24	3.30	1.35	3.26	1.32	2.95	1.24	2.96	1.01	2.92	1.12	2.91	1.05	2.86	1.03	Y
11. One can be religious without attending a church or synagogue.	2.00	1.23	1.92	1.30	1.62	.93	1.81	.94	2.04	.90	1.86	1.34	1.9[illegible]	.96	1.91	1.05	
12. I enjoy attending religious meetings.	2.90	1.21	3.31	1.27	3.03	1.22	2.93	1.12	2.96	1.06	2.83	1.12	3.25	1.07	2.94	1.17	S

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Table 4

Means* and Standard Deviations for Attitude Items by Year, Race and Sex

Item No.*	1973 Black Male Mean	1973 Black Male SD	1973 Black Female Mean	1973 Black Female SD	1973 White Male Mean	1973 White Male SD	1973 White Female Mean	1973 White Female SD	1983 Black Male Mean	1983 Black Male SD	1983 Black Female Mean	1983 Black Female SD	1983 White Male Mean	1983 White Male SD	1983 White Female Mean	1983 White Female SD	Significant Differences**
13. I do not enjoy listening to "soul" choirs singing "gospel" music.	4.33	1.05	4.62	.84	2.30	1.24	2.75	1.22	3.21	.21	3.63	1.04	2.31	1.18	2.50	1.34	Y, R, YxS, YxR
14. During the coming year, I expect to be more active in my church or synagogue than present.	3.22	1.01	3.30	.92	3.62	1.04	3.52	1.03	3.41	.84	3.25	1.04	3.52	1.08	3.46	1.04	
15. Students who do not have sexual intercourse before marriage are considered strange.	3.30	1.34	4.15	.91	3.83	1.11	4.34	.95	3.50	1.34	3.92	1.23	3.55	1.13	4.27	1.03	Y, S
16. I intend to use the services of a University chaplain or religious advisor during the coming year.	2.80	1.08	2.85	.73	3.27	1.03	3.01	1.19	3.25	.67	3.04	.94	3.29	.92	2.97	1.02	S
17. I would marry someone of another religions preference.	2.20	.67	2.23	1.12	2.19	1.12	2.15	1.34	2.42	.87	1.88	1.02	2.15	1.03	2.11	1.16	
18. I would participate in a "Jesus" movement on campus.	3.60	1.02	3.31	1.12	4.06	1.00	3.87	1.10	3.50	.73	3.46	.78	3.87	1.04	3.99	.93	R
19. My parents exposed me to too much religion.	3.10	1.11	3.84	1.03	3.84	1.02	4.07	1.04	4.04	.62	4.25	.96	3.90	1.04	4.31	.81	Y, S
20. Yoga is a good way to find peace of mind.	2.90	.68	2.92	1.02	2.96	.87	2.96	.86	3.08	.52	3.04	.75	3.29	.86	3.07	.91	Y
21. There is no life after death.	3.30	1.42	3.38	1.34	3.48	1.23	3.74	1.12	3.96	1.10	3.96	.93	3.90	1.04	3.98	1.10	Y

* 1=Strongly agree; 5=strongly disagree

** Differences significant at .05 using Analysis of Variance - Y=year, S=sex, R=race